New Orleans, LA (May 22, 2013) – At its May board meeting yesterday, The Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) took the first steps to implement a new Criminal Background Policy adopted on March 26. HANO is the first housing authority in the nation to develop procedures reducing barriers persons with criminal convictions face in seeking affordable housing and employment.

This innovative policy provides all individuals, regardless of their criminal records, greater access to employment and housing opportunities. The Vera Institute of Justice was contracted to assist HANO in developing and implementing the policy.

After extensive public consultation, Administrative Receiver David Gilmore yesterday approved amendments to HANO’s Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policy (ACOP), The Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) Administrative Plan, Procurement Policy, and the Employee Personnel Manual recommended by the Vera Institute reflecting the Criminal Background Policy.

“Other than the two federally required categories, no applicant will be automatically barred from receiving housing assistance because of his or her criminal background,” said Receiver Gilmore. “We are taking the necessary steps to amend the ACOP to make sure that those with criminal activity in their past who now seek productive lifestyles have a shot at a new beginning.”

The ACOP consolidates screening procedures and requirements. HANO will continue to conduct criminal background checks for all applicants 18 years and above to determine acceptance or denial of admission, and will apply new criteria to determine whether a past conviction represents a serious risk to the safety and well being of the community. HANO also amended the agency’s Procurement Policy which establishes the guidelines for the procurement of supplies, equipment, services, and construction. In accordance with the Equal Employment Opportunity
Commission’s Enforcement Guidance on the Consideration of Arrest and Conviction Records in Employment, the revised policy allows access to employment on all HANO-funded projects located at agency job sites. HANO recommends that all contractors subject to the policy adopt best practices by developing written procedures for screening applicants, and suggest they consider the nature of work to be performed, age at the time of conviction, time since conviction, and nature of the offense, and should also remove questions about criminal histories from job applications.

Gilmore also approved changes to the Employee Personnel Manual as it relates to the new policy, many of which HANO had already begun implementing. “We will no longer inquire into an applicant’s criminal background at the time of the application. We will do so only when we have preliminarily determined to offer someone a job and will not deny otherwise suitable candidate employment except in the most serious circumstances,” said Gilmore. “If we’re serious about changing behavior we have to remove the barriers to opportunities for decent housing and employment.”

For more information visit www.hano.org or www.vera.org.

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